



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
CITY OF CHICAGO

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CONTACT:

Mayor's Press Office

312.744.3334

press@cityofchicago.org

CHICAGO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH COMMISSIONER TESTIFIES BEFORE SENATE PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE IN SUPPORT OF TOBACCO 21 LEGISLATION

Today, Dr. Julie Morita, Commissioner, Chicago Department of Public Health, testified before the Illinois Senate Public Health Committee in support of raising the tobacco purchasing age to 21 in Illinois. This measure will keep thousands of today's youth from taking up a deadly habit, reducing the disease and deaths associated with tobacco use and putting us closer to a tobacco-free generation. The legislation is sponsored by Senator Julie Morrison and Representative Camille Lilly.

Under the leadership of Mayor Rahm Emanuel, the City of Chicago raised the age to purchase tobacco products to 21, increased taxes on tobacco products and used those resources to support children's health, banned tobacco discounts and sampling and required that clerks who ring up tobacco sales be at least 21. Chicago was the first big city to implement an e-cigarette tax and has passed an ordinance requiring warning signs disclosing the harms of non-cigarette tobacco products to be posted at all retailers. The City has also restricted the location of tobacco products in store to minimize youth exposure. As a result of these actions, teen smoking in the city has reached a record low of six percent, dropping by more than half over the last six years.

Dr. Morita's remarks as prepared are as follows:

Good afternoon. My name is Dr. Julie Morita and I am the Commissioner of the Chicago Department of Public Health. I'm here because the Chicago Department of Public Health and the City of Chicago strongly support the proposed legislation to raise the tobacco purchasing age to 21 throughout Illinois. Tobacco use remains the nation's leading cause of preventable disease and death. We know the easiest way to reduce tobacco use is to ensure that young people never start in the first place. We are doing this in Chicago. Over the past eight years we have passed strong laws to make tobacco less accessible, affordable and attractive—and have dramatically reduced the number of teens and young adults who are smoking. These laws include increasing taxes on cigarettes, e-cigarettes, cigars and smokeless tobacco; including e-cigarettes in the Clean Indoor Air Ordinance, and banning the sale of flavored tobacco near high schools. Today, youth and young adult cigarette smoking in Chicago is the lowest it has ever been.

The evidence for Tobacco 21 is strong. The 18-20 age range is a critical time as teenagers' brains are not yet fully developed, making them more vulnerable to nicotine addiction. More than 95% of smokers started before they turned 21. A report issued by the National Academy of Sciences estimated that raising the tobacco purchase age to 21 would cut tobacco use by 12% and reduce tobacco-related deaths by 10%.

In 2016, Chicago joined the growing nationwide Tobacco 21 movement and raised the age for purchasing tobacco within city limits from 18 to 21. Following a smooth implementation, the City saw a sharp and immediate decline in use of both cigarettes and e-cigarettes among 18-20 year-olds, from 15.2% to 9.7%. Furthermore, in 2017, teen cigarette smoking reached a new historic low of 6%. This is down from 25% in 2001. Just a few years ago, one in four Chicago teens smoked. Today that number is one in twenty. We know that by helping young people to never light their first cigarette, we are helping them live longer, healthier lives.

There is still work to do, but due in part to the steps Chicago has taken, we are on the verge of a tobacco-free generation. With the proposed state legislation, Illinois has the opportunity to help children across the state, just as our colleagues in six other states have done. Tobacco 21 has broad public support, would have a dramatic impact on smoking initiation, and could save billions in medical costs. There are now over 30 local Tobacco 21 laws throughout the state. By passing this law, we can ensure that all tobacco retailers play by the same rules. By passing this law, Illinois will join the critical fight to reduce tobacco use. Most importantly, by passing this law, we can save the lives of thousands—allowing more children to lead happy, healthy, tobacco-free lives.

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